



Department of Justice

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EIGHT DEFENDANTS SENTENCED TO FEDERAL PRISON IN "OPERATION UNDERWORLD" FEDERAL DRUG CASE

ATLANTA, GA - ALBERT ARROYO-GOMEZ, 37; ALEX ARROYO-GOMEZ, 39; ARIEL ARROYO-GOMEZ, 29; ROMERO VEGA, 34; ROBERTO PEREZ, 32, all of Guerrero, Mexico; HORACIO VARGAS-MONTES, 37, of Nayarit, Mexico; and ANGEL COVARRUBIAS, 44, also of Guerrero, Mexico, have been sentenced to prison by United States District Judge Julie Carnes for their participation in a multi-state, multi-million dollar drug-trafficking organization, dismantled by a federal investigation known as "Operation Underworld." The last of the sentences were handed down late yesterday.

United States Attorney Sally Quillian Yates said, "Until they were arrested, these defendants were part of a drug organization that specialized in the distribution of Mexican crystal methamphetamine. Crystal meth is a particularly dangerous drug that inflicts untold damage on our communities. The sentences handed down by the court reflect the seriousness of the criminal activity that was uncovered in the case."

"This week's prison sentences are a reminder of the serious consequences drug traffickers face for trying to bring and distribute illicit drugs into our communities," said Brock Nicholson, acting special agent in charge of the ICE Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) office in Atlanta. "ICE remains committed to dismantling the international drug trade while ensuring that those involved don't financially benefit from it."

ALBERT ARROYO-GOMEZ was sentenced to 15 years in prison to be followed by 5 years of supervised release. ALBERT ARROYO-GOMEZ pleaded guilty to the charges on December 10, 2009.

ALEX ARROYO-GOMEZ was sentenced to 11 years, 3 months in prison to be followed by 5 years of supervised release. ALEX ARROYO-GOMEZ pleaded guilty to the charges on December 10, 2009.

ARIEL ARROYO-GOMEZ was sentenced to 15 years in prison to be followed by 5

years of supervised release. ARIEL ARROYO-GOMEZ pleaded guilty to the charges on December 10, 2009.

ROMERO VEGA was sentenced to 10 years, 6 months in prison to be followed by 5 years of supervised release. VEGA pleaded guilty to the charges on January 10, 2010.

ROBERTO PEREZ was sentenced to 7 years, 6 months in prison to be followed by 5 years of supervised release. PEREZ pleaded guilty to the charges on April 14, 2009.

VARGAS-MONTES was sentenced to 10 years in prison to be followed by 5 years of supervised release. VARGAS-MONTES pleaded guilty to the charges on December 10, 2009.

COVARRUBIAS was sentenced to 4 years, 9 months in prison to be followed by 5 years of supervised release. COVARRUBIAS pleaded guilty to the charges on January 7, 2010.

According to United States Attorney Yates, the charges and other information presented in court: Beginning in at least early 2008, the defendants and others associated with the organization had been distributing hundreds of kilograms of drugs, generating millions of dollars in drug proceeds. At its height, the organization actively distributed crystal methamphetamine, cocaine and marijuana in Georgia, North Carolina, and Illinois.

In April 2008, a confidential source helped to start a federal investigation into the drug scheme. By December, 2008, the organization was dismantled by federal authorities as part of "Operation Underworld," a joint investigation involving U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and a variety of state and local law enforcement agencies. Through surveillance, undercover drug purchases, telephone wiretaps, and extensive coordination among the law enforcement agencies, the investigative team successfully identified and arrested numerous members of the organization, including the defendants sentenced in this case. Twenty-one individuals have been indicted by a federal grand jury for their participation in the crimes. Fourteen have been convicted through guilty plea. The other defendants remain fugitives in the case.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta recommends parents and children learn about the dangers of drugs at the following web site: www.justthinktwice.com.

This case was investigated by Special Agents of U. S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Assistant United States Attorney Kurt R. Erskine prosecuted the case.

For further information please contact Sally Q. Yates, United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is www.justice.gov/usao/gan.